

Identifying Common Characteristics of Barren County Status Offenders

Erin Wolf

This research study identified common characteristics of status offenders, and Barren County Social Service Workers descriptions of these characteristics. Existing data was reviewed and face-to-face interviews were conducted with the participants. Information obtained from the study will be used to describe the population standard in Barren County and potentially identify children who are at risk for committing status offenses at an early age. Based upon the results of the study, a typical Barren County status offender is a white, male, Habitual Truant, who has not been an identified victim of a child protection case. The Social Service Workers appear to have preconceived ideas of what a “typical” status offender looks like, but their opinions do not match the actual data.

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Purpose

- To identify common characteristics of juveniles when they commit status offenses.
- To identify DPP employee's descriptions of these characteristics.

Quantitative Question

- What are some of the common characteristics of juveniles when they commit status offenses?



Methodology

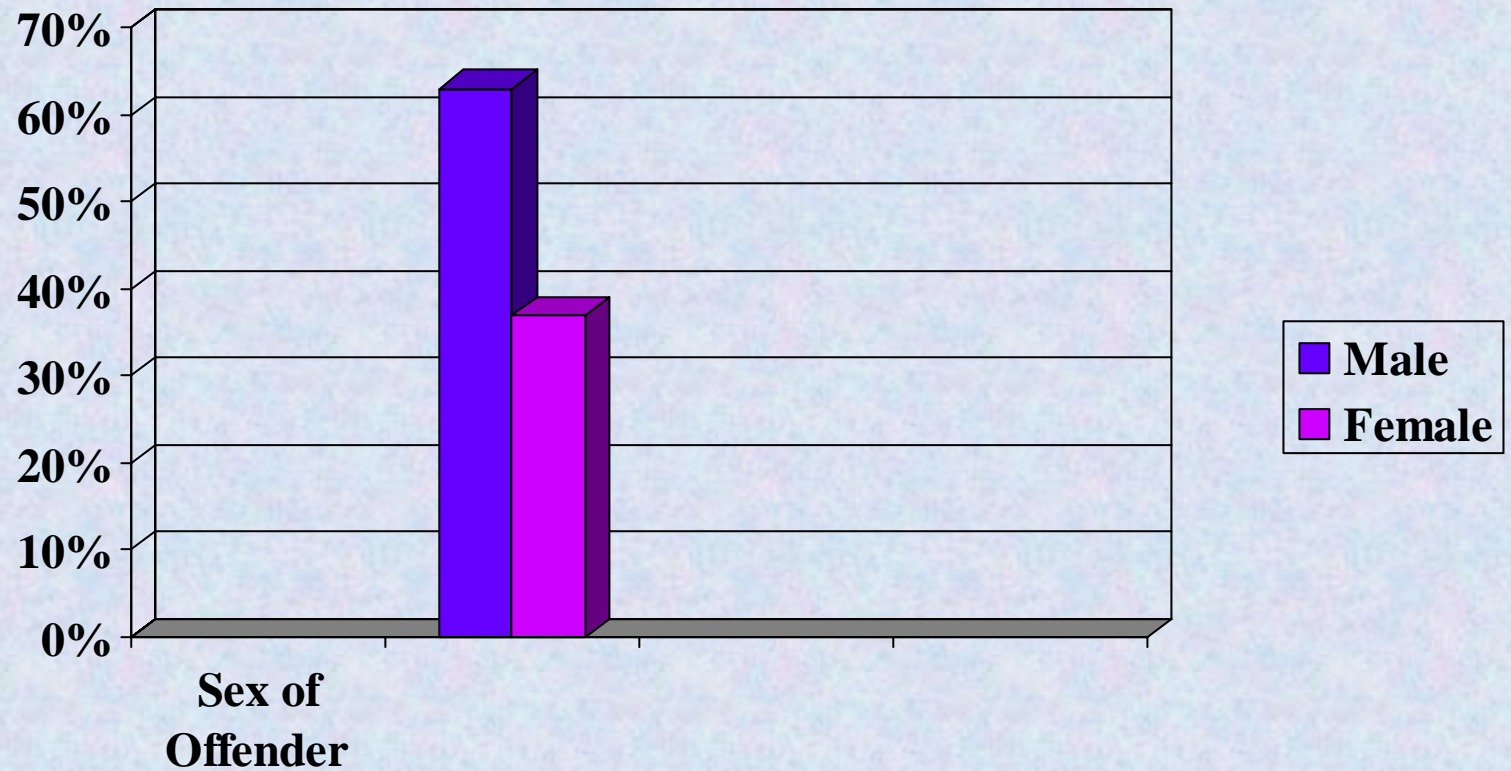
- descriptive design
- non-experimental
- reviewed existing data from June 2000 through June 2001
- reviewed 100% of cases (27 cases)
- code sheet recorded all demographics

Methodology Continued...

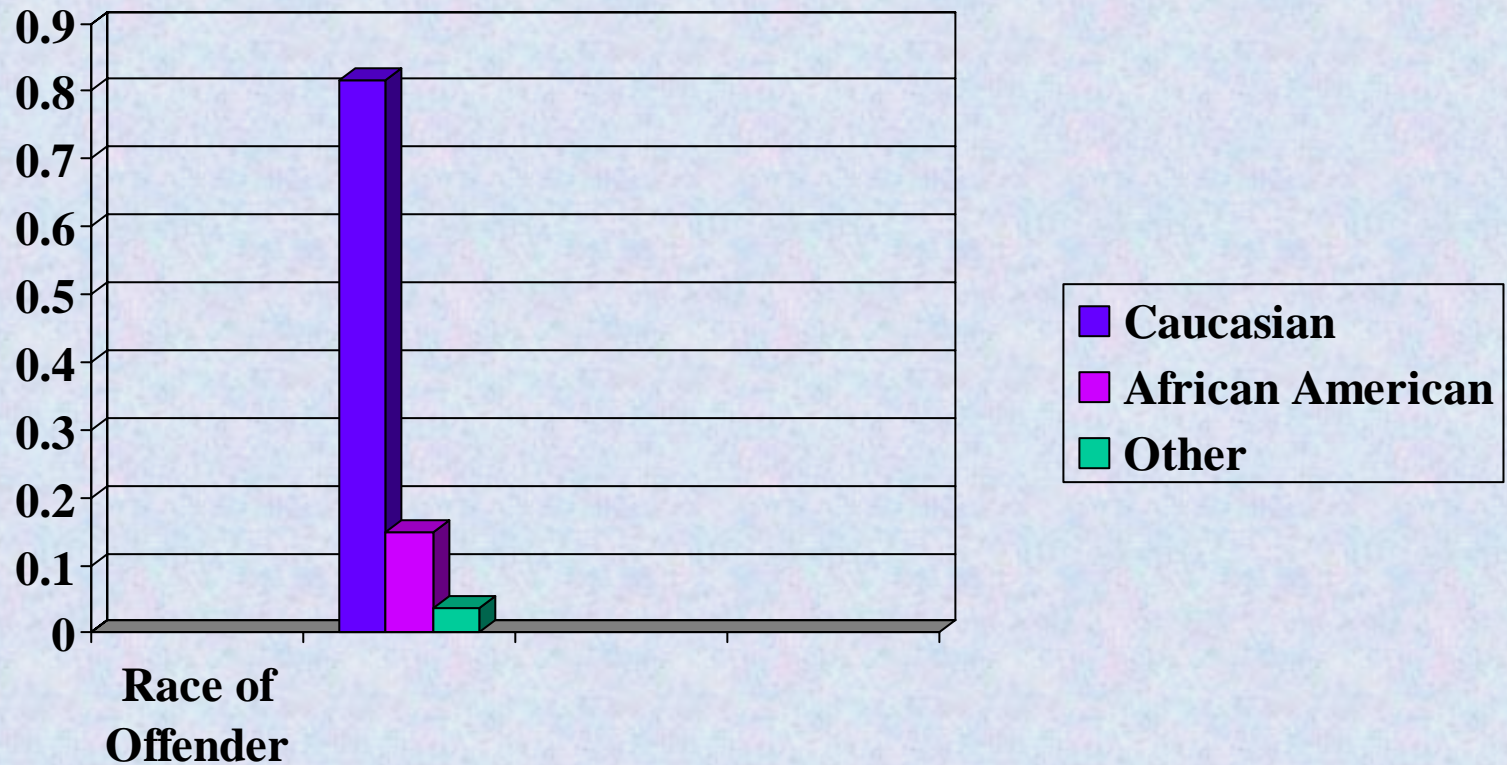
(code sheet variables)

- Sex
- Race
- Age
- Guardian
- Offense
- # Court appearances
- Special education
- School
- Physical limitations
- Mental limitations
- Government recipient
- CPS victim

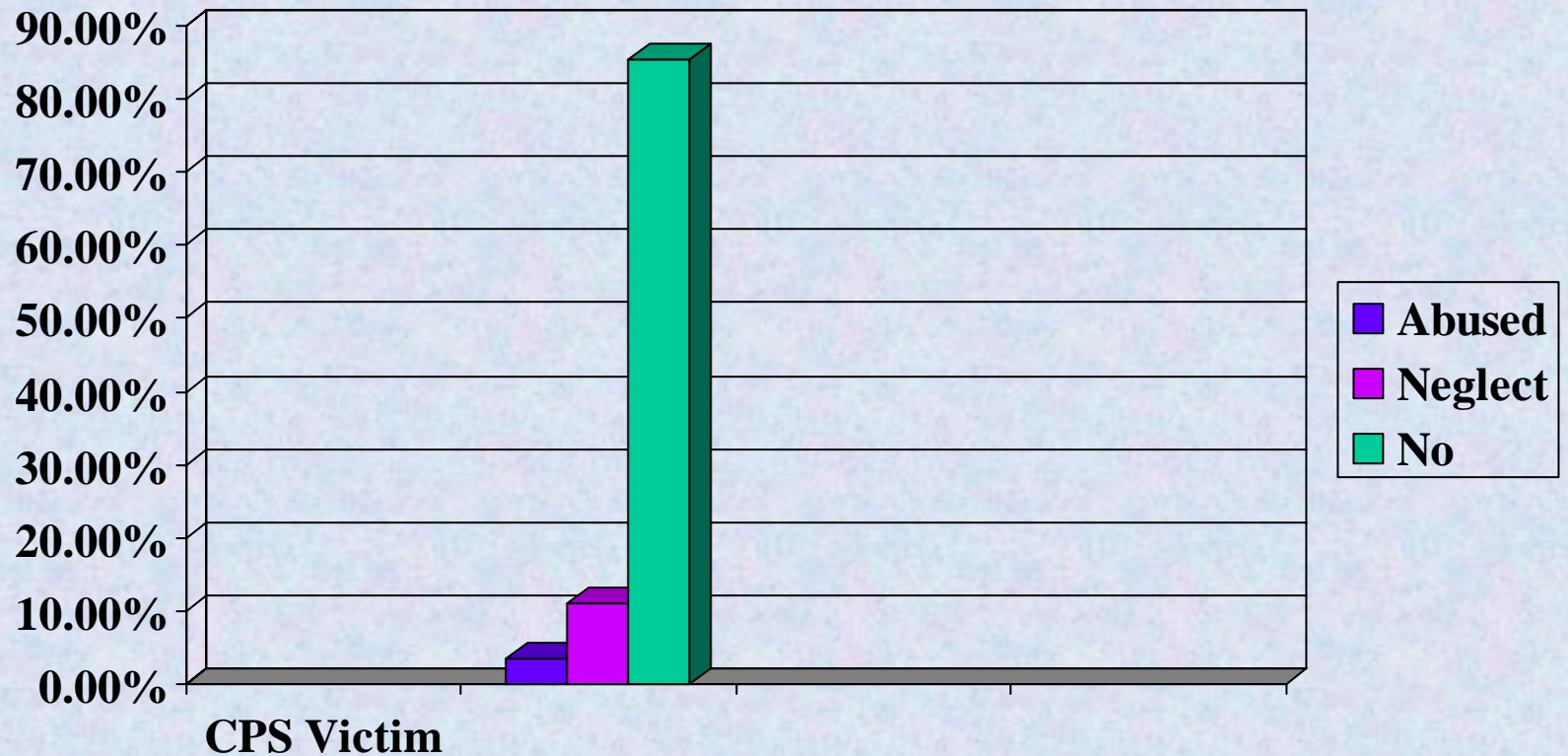
Results



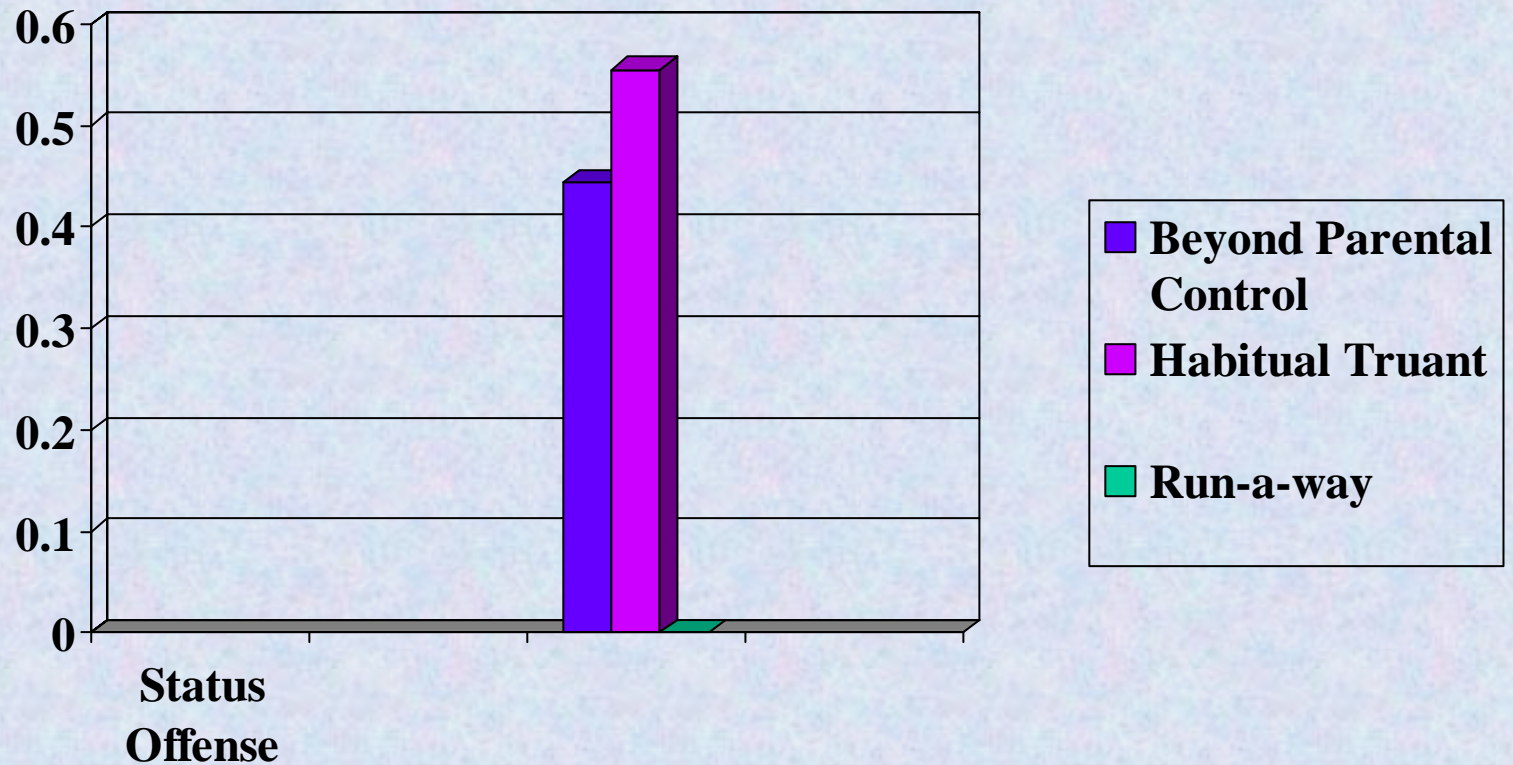
Results continued...



Results continued...



Results continued...



Discussion

- Implications for practice: Based upon the results of the study, a typical Barren County Status Offender is a white, male, Habitual Truant, who has not been an identified victim of a child protection case.

Discussion continued...

- Strength: representative of Barren County
- Limitation: not representative of any other county in Kentucky & small size of sample

Qualitative Question

- How do Barren County DPP social service workers describe the characteristics of status offenders?

Methodology

- Ethnography
- 10 in-depth interviews with Social Service Workers in the Barren County DPP office
- Written record of the interviews

Major Themes

- Beyond Parental Control (8 of 10)
- Seeking independence
- Welfare recipient
- Parents behavior will influence the child
- CPS involvement (9 of 10)
- Males
- “smart ass” (4 of 10)
- no repercussions for actions

Salient Quotes

- “The child wants to be treated like an adult, but they’re not yet an adult. The child wants more freedom.”



Quotes continued...

- “Yes, abuse or neglect will influence if a child commits status offenses. If abuse/neglect is occurring, it obviously an unhappy home. This unhappiness leads to committing offenses.”



Quotes continued...

- “Status offenders are more likely to live in the projects.”
- “The majority of the offenders are low income.”



Quotes continued...

- “Our judicial system doesn’t punish for their offenses. If a child isn’t going to school, there isn’t anything that the court can say, except-go to school.”



Discussion

- Strengths: all Social Service Workers participated in the study
- Limitations: the results are not representative of all workers across the state

Conclusion

- The social service workers appear to have preconceived ideas of what a “typical” status offender looks like.
- The opinions of the workers do not match the actual data.